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Clarence Ramey, a B.A. and former UMO janitor,

by Fred Rogers

Clarence Ramey is black, college educated and a former UMO janitor. But Ramey was fired last May, not because he was black, but, as he said, because he tried to initiate changes in a system where change may be impossible.

Ramey lives on an 80-acre farm in Troy, Maine, with his wife and four children. Ramey and his family came to Maine two years ago in search of cheap farm land and a new way of life.

He came to the UMO campus looking for information on growing crops, and while he was here he noticed an ad for two janitors.

Ramey said, "I applied for the job and was accepted, although my superiors were a little suspicious as to why a man with my education wanted to be a janitor." However, there were others who were impressed that Ramey wanted to be a janitor despite his education.

Ramey was placed on the 4:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. shift as a floater, a man not assigned to a specific building, but who moves from one to another.

After about three weeks of work Ramey recognized several areas where he thought changes should be made. In an attempt to bring these changes to the attention of his superiors, Ramey said he met one impasse after another. According to Ramey, the attitude of his superiors was "you can't get anything done around here."

According to Frank St. Louis, head of the classified employees union, "Ramey came to me and told me that he was going to initiate a one-man crusade for change at the expense of his job." Some of Ramey's ideas were good but others were a little too progressive for UMO. Ramey was dedicated to his ideas and interested in improving the system.

Ramey's major complaint was that the present system did not provide the janitors with incentive, therefore they had little or no pride in their work. Ramey also felt that the men were not utilized to the best of their abilities.



Clarence Ramey on his 80-acre farm in Troy

Clarence Ramey, a 39-year old black man, came to Maine two years ago and took a job as a construction worker in Portland. A co-worker asked Ramey why he was in Maine and why he had chosen to be a construction worker. Ramey replied, "I'm helping to build America."

Clarence Ramey is still "helping to build America" in Troy, Maine. He's not selling U.S. Savings Bonds or running for political office. "Helping to build

His conflicts with supervisors started when he raised the issue of the leak in the foundation of North Stevens Hall. According to Ramey, "Every time it rains the foundation leaks and a janitor is required to stay there and mop up the water until the leak stops." Often there are as many as two or three inches of water on the basement floor during a rain storm." The obvious solution for Ramey was to have the wall fixed, releasing this particular janitor for use somewhere else. Ramey then reported this to his superiors, who in turn replied either, "you can't get anything done around here" or "it's been that way for years." Ramey said he found this attitude to be the same throughout the administrative hierarchy, right on up to President Libby's office.

Ramey also felt that janitors weren't utilized to the best of their abilities and weren't encouraged to improve themselves. According to Ramey, many of the janitors

Ramey:

America" is his description of a life style and philosophy that Ramey has devoted his life to.

Born and reared in Illinois, Ramey spent eight years in the Air Force before attending college in Vermont, from which he graduated with a degree in political science in 1967. He has lately been working on a two-year masters program in public administration at the University of Minnesota. Ramey attended Goddard on a special program that paid part of his tuition, and worked as a life guard and bartender summers in the Catskill Mountains.

While at Goddard, Ramey met his wife, Carolyn, who shared the same ideals and goals as himself. She is white. Together they

worked at various jobs, which took them from Puerto Rico to New York and eventually to Troy, Maine.

Since graduation from college, Ramey has been helping himself by helping others in a variety of jobs. Ramey has worked for Associated Press in San Juan, the Community Service in Boston, the Department of Health in Illinois, for Senior Citizen programs in Vermont, and as assistant director for the New York-Vermont Youth Project, not to mention teaching at Unity College and, of course, doing janitorial work at UMO.

Ramey and his wife have lived in both white and black neighborhoods and

was fired because he 'tried to initiate change'

are service veterans. He saw mopping floors as "an insult to these veterans." Considering their backgrounds, Ramey suggested that maybe these men would be better utilized if they were allowed to work with ROTC in assisting capacity. Ramey suggested that this idea should be applied to all semi-professionals employed as janitors at UMO. He pointed out that janitors with woodcutting or forestry backgrounds would be better utilized if they were working at the forestry building in some capacity. According to Ramey, "This would benefit both the worker and the administration; the worker would be working in surroundings with which he has had previous interest and experience." This, he said, would encourage a janitor to develop more pride in his work.

Ramey's other suggestions concerned the time needed to do a particular job and the possibility of an employee being able to bring a member of his family to work with him.

According to Ramey, every janitor is required to work eight hours, although most

When Ramey took his oldest daughter to school for the first time, some children yelled, 'Here come the niggers!'"

The principal said this would be suppressed, but Ramey said that education, not suppression, would cure the attitude.

of the work can be done in half that time. Ramey said that he "would do the work assigned to me and then go home regardless of how long it took." Ramey said, "Everyone works about four hours and loafs the other four hours. They take showers, and play cards." Ramey suggests that the buildings be assigned to janitors and they be allowed to do the assigned work as slowly or as quickly as they like. If they should finish within eight hours the remaining time should

'I'm helping to build America'

have been rebuffed by both black and white groups. According to Ramey he and his wife had to recognize each other as individuals rather than attempting to change the other from black to white or vice-versa. The Ramey's say they no longer see people as black or white or yellow, but as individuals with separate and unique identities. Ramey sees the solution to the racial problem as one which will require everyone to work together.

Talking with Clarence Ramey, one soon realizes that he is sincere, but not driven. He eases one into a conversation, talking at great lengths about what he sees and what he would like to see. He listens, but you

somehow feel he's heard the questions before, still he answers them with new vigor in a light manner which is often cynical as well as humorous.

Mrs. Ramey follows the conversation intently as she works about the house, interjecting support and explanation as her husband rushes from one subject to another, leaving no aspect untouched. Carolyn Ramey has worked as a writer for the *Bangor News*, but now spends her time at home with the children.

The Ramey's and their four children, ranging in ages from one to five, are beginning their third year in Troy.

Ramey recalled the first day of classes for his oldest daughter.

When the entire family took the girl to school they were confronted by several children yelling, "Here come the niggers." The school principal reacted by assuring Ramey that this attitude would be suppressed. Ramey then replied that education, not suppression, was the answer. Ramey said, "The children imply no hatred with the word nigger, but have picked it up at home or from television. Therefore the children must be taught to disregard labels before they become tools of hatred rather than just words."

The Ramey's have no particular plans for the future, other than living on their farm and raising their children. Ramey said,

"Money is no longer an ambition in my life and any job I take will be enough income to allow us to do what we want."

Several students from Unity College have approached Ramey about starting a class in alternative life styles, a subject Ramey feels has great potential. However, nothing concrete has been accomplished.

Ramey and his wife have started a book, but lack of funds leaves the completion date uncertain. They feel that their life is "a living laboratory for interracial marriage" and their experience should be contributed to the race issue.

be theirs. They could go home early or use the time to take a course that might interest them.

The problem here, according to Frank St. Louis, is that a janitor's work cannot be finished in eight hours; in fact, a janitor's work is never done. The discrepancy between Ramey's idea and that of St. Louis is the difference between overall maintenance of a building and everyday cleaning. Ramey agrees that a building needs a major cleaning from time to time, but still feels that assigning buildings to janitors and letting them work without supervision will develop pride and better workmanship in the janitors.

Ramey's final complaint dealt with the idea of an employee bringing a member of his family to work with him. Ramey cited one case where the son of a UMO janitor had been arrested twice for a drug violation and was fined \$100 each time.

Ramey suggested that this janitor be allowed to bring his son to work with him, thereby keeping the boy off the streets and exposing him to the university life. Frank St. Louis, on the other hand, said, "Workman Compensation Laws and Child Labor Laws make this idea impractical if not illegal." However, Ramey feels that the boy might learn something or at least see what his father has to do to earn the money that paid his fines.

Ramey feels strongly about these ideas and was willing to sacrifice his job in an attempt to bring them to the attention of the administration. According to Frank St. Louis, "Ramey intentionally broke the rules, knowing he would be fired, in order to illustrate his complaints and suggestions."

Both Ramey and Frank St. Louis agreed that Ramey's firing had no racial implications whatsoever. Speaking about his job, Ramey said, "I enjoyed the people I worked with; they were a good bunch of guys. My gripe was not with the employees, but with the administration."

The janitorial service hasn't changed since Clarence Ramey left, with one possible exception. "There will probably never be another outspoken, thinking janitor at UMO," Ramey said.